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ABSTRACT

A program developed to teach French civilization and modern France at the U.S. Naval Academy (Annapolis, Maryland) was designed to take advantage of readily available, relatively sophisticated technology for classroom instruction. The hardware used includes a satellite earth station that receives regular television broadcasts from France, a central mainframe computer with a variety of systems and services, a personal computer linked to the mainframe, videocassette recorders and players in faculty offices and classrooms, and high-technology electronic classrooms and language laboratories. Software, special programs, services, and materials include word processing software, grammar drill and text treatment software, administrative software, electronic mail, telephone communications network, facsimile transmission, photocopying, slide and movie projectors, video and audio recording collections, visual aids, direct satellite television transmissions, interactive video in progress, and a computer-accessible library information network. Considerations in the use of these resources include careful organization, balancing authentic materials with discussion time, and advance planning on the teacher's part. Several typical uses of the technology illustrate the variety of resources that can be integrated into one lesson or unit, for either syllabus preparation or classroom use, creating a powerful learning environment based on authentic cultural sounds and images. (MSE)

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TITLE OF PAPER: "Minimize Subjective Theory, Maximize Authentic Experience in the Teaching of French Civilization"

ABSTRACT: The purpose of my presentation today is to demonstrate how technology can be used to maximize the teaching-learning experience about French Civilization and Modern France and render it more effective and authentic than it has ever been before. I shall first explain the special circumstances in which this project developed, report on the technology I had at my disposal and make a few recommendations on organizational strategies. Then, I shall provide a specific example on how technology is integrated into my teaching and, finally, offer my conclusions with regard to the benefits that can be derived from such a program.

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I. Special Goals and Circumstances

The program I propose to discuss with you today was developed at the United States Naval Academy to teach French Civilization and Modern France to future officers of the United States Navy. The students, called midshipmen, are carefully selected on the basis of their intellectual, physical and personal qualities and, most importantly, their leadership potential. At the Academy, they undergo four years of rigorous academic, physical and professional training, during which their time is very precious and the quality of education of the highest essence.

My courses on French Civilization and Modern France are geared toward the fourth, that is, the last year of study, when students have already acquired a certain proficiency

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in the language and are able to read and understand French quite readily but not speak or write it without making mistakes.

As a civilian professor of French, my task is to acquaint midshipmen with significant historical developments in French Civilization, from the prehistoric cave drawings at Lascaux to the most recent political events of 1991. I am to open their horizons and develop their sensitivities toward another culture and thus enhance their powers of judgement as well as their moral and ethical thinking. My own personal and professional ethics dictate that I do my best to help these young men and women grow into well informed and responsible human beings who in their future leading positions will make enlightened decisions involving this country and others.

I meet my students three times a week for fifty minutes in class, not much more. In order to accomplish my task, I am fortunate to have at my disposal some of the most sophisticated tools provided by recent technology.

II. Available Technology

Basic Hardware

1. A powerful satellite earth station with a 12-meter dish that allows for the reception of regular television broadcasts from France (and many other countries around the globe) directly at my office and my classroom.

2. An Academy-wide central main frame provides access to a multiplicity of computer systems and services.

3. Each individual faculty office and midshipman room is equipped with a personal IBM-compatible computer (Zenith 248) which is hooked up to the Academy main frame. We have dot matrix printers in our offices and some laser printers available to the faculty.

4. A video cassette recorder and television monitor in each faculty office make it very convenient to preview video recordings and develop questionnaires and exercises before their use in class or in the laboratory.

5. There are multi-standard video cassette recorder in each of my "designated" classrooms. These allow me to project video recordings of cultural, historical, political and geographical programs that I have been collecting over the years in various countries irrespective of their specific technological systems such as PAL, SECAM or NTSC.

6. High-tech electronic classrooms and language laboratories are available for interactive video viewing and exercises.

As far as Software, Special Programs, Services and Materials are concerned, we are using:

1. Word-Perfect 5.1 for convenient word processing, editing and desk-top publishing. Questionnaires, exams and exercises can easily be composed, revised and stored for later use. Periodic updating of course materials is greatly facilitated.

2. The CALIS program, developed by Duke University, is used for grammar drills and text treatment.

3. VERBAPUCE, produced by the Universiteit Antwerpen, provides for drills of irregular verbs.

4. Within the central time-sharing system at the Academy, various programs have been established for administrative tasks such as accountability, office and student records, validation procedures and more.

5. The central mail system or E-mail allow for rapid communication with anyone across the Academy and other institutions. We can send messages and even exam

questions directly to individuals or a whole class and receive their answers back instantaneously.

6. A telephone system with direct lines to all parts of the Academy, the Washington-Baltimore area with its libraries and bookstores, and an AUTOVAN system that connects us with all other military institutions are most convenient. Conference calls and voice/vision communications will hopefully be established in the near future so that we can chat with out friends and students across the Atlantic.

7. FAX machines allows us to access the whole world and are great for beating deadlines in signing up for conferences, ordering books or securing admission to competitive events.

8. There are XEROX machines that copy, reduce, magnify and produce black and white or even color transparencies for overhead projection in the classroom or at conference presentations.

9. Slide and movie projectors as well as tape decks are available from our Educational Resources Center where we can also produce our own video recordings of round tables or plays.

10. Over the years, I have assembled a carefully selected collection of video recordings of cultural, historical, political and geographic programs, such as "Les Châteaux de la Loire," "Le Mont Saint-Michel," "Le Louvre," "Versailles," "Carmen," "Phèdre," "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," "The Trials of Charles de Gaulle" and "The Battle of Algiers."

11. I own audio cassettes of speeches by de Gaulle, Leon Blum, and most of the presidents of the Fifth Republic and have musical recordings of Gregorian chants, works by Lulli, Rameau, Ravel, Bizet and Boulez and, naturally, "La Marseillaise.". I purchased recorded interviews with Jean-Paul Sartre, and produced my own with French novelists,

critics, lycée- and university students.

12. My teaching tools include slides and still frames of art work, typical French landscapes, monuments and documents.

13. Direct satellite transmissions, for instance, of the news programs of France's TV5, and subscriptions to monthly special telecasts such as "France TV Magazine," are released directly to our offices and classrooms.

14. Finally, I am just in the process of developing Interactive video programs on French civilization (in collaboration with France TV Magazine, UMBC). So far, I have put together two compact laser discs. Once the video exercises are finished, they will enhance even more the program I am outlining here.

15. I should like to mention our well automated Nimitz Library that provides access to the holdings of the Library of Congress and an interesting selection of DC-RAMS. I can also use my PC to access its card catalogue from my office or order interlibrary loans.

III. A Word on Organizational Strategies

The possible uses of technology in the teaching of foreign languages and civilizations already seem endless. Technology in itself, however, can only be useful when it is properly applied to the specific goals of each course or program. The judicious selection and organization of available systems and materials is thus the primordial task of good and responsible teaching. Yet even in this difficult process, technology can help control the wealth of the materials it provides. Available options can be organized in files that appear at the push of a button.

For my course in the Fall semester, dealing with the Development of French Civilization, I have special files on each century, and within each file, subfiles, for instance,

on the art, architecture, literature, history, philosophy and social life of the historical period. For the Spring semester, dealing with Modern France after 1945, my files are organized by topics such as geography, industry, transportation, education, "francophonie," the Fifth Republic, political parties, literature, business correspondence and the like. Each time I visit France or attend conferences, my files are likely to receive some input: new maps, charts, illustrations and recordings. Each time I teach this course --I have been teaching it since 1984--, I rearrange its contents to stress what seems to correspond or even respond to the preoccupations of the particular historical moment: ethics, feminism, war, the right of human beings or criminals to live or to die, capitalism vs. the bankruptcy of communism.

In using technology in teaching, it is important to balance the presentation of authentic data with enough time for discussion to involve the students' interest and allow them to discover the relevance of the material to their own lives and thinking. Audiovisual presentations should generally be short and concise but there should also be opportunities for total immersion over an extended period of time. Without such careful planning, the use of technology could be counterproductive and add to the passive viewing and listening habits so detrimental to our modern TV generation.

Selected materials must constantly be questioned, discussed and tested. Not to lose valuable time, they require pre- and post-viewing or -listening treatment by the instructor. It is thus a continuously engaging process for both the student and the professor who, in addition to the actual teaching, each year faces the challenge of establishing the best possible syllabus for a course that is based on various forms of technology in addition to the traditional textbook. The professor has to orchestrate and synchronize the technical production in class, make sure that all the necessary equipment is there, that it works, and

wastes not one of the precious fifty minutes of class time. It is not an easy task.

IV. Examples of Typical Uses of Technology in my Courses

1. Each fall, I devote one or two 50-minute periods to the study of the 1789 Revolution in France. In the 1989 bicentennial year, I added one more lesson to our usual discussions and referred to the topic repeatedly throughout the semester. Before embarking on the Revolution, we had studied the reign of Louis XV and XVI, the eighteenth-century philosophers, the Encyclopedia and the arts and architecture reflecting the spirit of the historical moment. As homework, the midshipmen had read the assigned pages in our detailed French Civilization textbook (Jean Thoraval, Les Grandes Etapes de la Civilisation Française) with all pertinent quotations, from the warnings of Turgot, the oath of the "General Estates," to the declaration of the Assembly that the homeland was in danger. On our large maps, we identified Versailles, the Jeu de Paume," the Bastille and the Tuileries. We looked at slides of paintings depicting scenes and figure heads of the revolution such as Danton and Robespierre. I showed segments of the film "La Nuit de Varenne," featuring the aristocracy and how they dressed, spoke and what they valued. This was followed by excerpts from Jean Renoir's film "La Marseillaise" (1938), depicting Louis XVI at breakfast on July 14, 1789 and, in a later segment, the revolutionary speech of a woman at a Jacobin club in Marseille. I showed parts of Ariane Mnouchkine's famous production, entitled "1789," which dramatizes the exploitation of the Third Estate by the two powerful ruling classes, Church and Nobility. I had put on the wall of our classroom a large, colorful poster of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" and, by means of an overhead projector, red with my students a few articles of the "Declaration" and compared it to the one by Olympe de Gouge and the revolutionary women. We listened to the

passionate tunes of the "Marseillaise," translated and compared it in form and content to our own hymns and then (for fun and with enthusiasm) recorded our own singing of it in class. We viewed slides and cartoons depicting symbols of revolutionary France such as the most recent "Marianne," inspired by the features of Brigitte Bardot. We compared the costumes of the new "citizens" to the elaborate robes and wigs of the aristocrats. A few midshipmen, on their own, had seen the film "Danton" and delighted in debating the role of Robespierre in the years of terror and execution. This led us to the discussion of Mitterrand's decision, in 1981, to abolish the death penalty and with it the guillotine, and how criminals and political prisoners nowadays should be treated. One midshipman presented paintings by David and went into some vivid detail about Charlotte Corday's stabbing of Marat in his bathtub. Yet it was the fragment of a telecast from the bicentennial celebrations in Paris, on July 14, 1989, where Jessie Norman, draped in a large "Tricolore," much like Delacroix's "Liberty leading the people," looking enormous and powerful, fills the screen in a passionate rendering of the Marseillaise, that brought back the contemporary relevance of the French Revolution to my midshipmen. The image and voice of the Australian Black opera star, better known in France than in America, embodied the revolutionary spirit of 1789 and its meaning today, two centuries later.

Only a few months after that, in the Fall of 1989, we saw in one of the regular satellite telecasts of the French news to which we usually devote about ten minutes of class on each Fridays the streams of East Germans trying to escape to freedom through Hungary and, on November 9, the ominous Berlin wall, scribbled with graffiti about peace, humanity and freedom, come crumbling down in front of our eyes. My students of the Fall of 1989 are not likely to forget this lesson of the 1789 Revolution and the enduring spirit of one of the greatest moments in French History and Civilization.

2. More in the background, I used my PC to establish questionnaires on most of the segments we viewed, so that students could review them back in their rooms. Using the mail system, I was able to alert my class to the times when the film "Danton" would be projected through our central diffusion system so they could view it individually. From my file on final exams I pulled the one I had used the previous year, recomposed it without having to redo the heading and saved it for future reference. After final exams, I punched my grades into the Time Sharing System for transmission to my chairman, the registrar and each individual student in his or her room. I called up centrally recorded pre-registration lists of midshipmen who had signed up for my course on Modern France, given in the Spring. In composing my new syllabus, I could use parts of the previous one, transferring a few blocs directly into my new syllabus and thus saving precious time in typing and editing.

In 1990, I had decided to concentrate on Charles de Gaulle, his role in the Resistance, Algeria, the constitution of the Fifth Republic, his dilemma after 1968, and finally compare his government and person to the one of Mitterrand today. From our Library, I was able to access the bibliography of the MLA and the catalog of the Library of Congress in Washington to check whether any new studies of de Gaulle had been done that would be particularly interesting to us. My own steadily growing technological files on this period contained interviews with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, recordings by Albert Camus, de Gaulle's famous speeches from London, in particular the one of 8 June 1940. A prize-winning BBC documentary of de Gaulle's trials during the Algerian war (by George Vicas) and a film on the "Battle of Algiers" seemed particularly suited to the discussion of the ethics of war in the months preceding the conflict in the Persian Golf. To my video recordings of the presidents and prime ministers that followed

de Gaulle in the Fifth Republic, one more was added in 1991: Prime Minister Edith Cresson.

V. Benefits of Teaching with Technology

Authentic sounds and images are brought directly into the classroom. Midshipmen are exposed to real situations and native but differing uses of French speech, mannerisms and attitudes. Comprehension of the spoken language is enhanced in an unprecedented way, comparable only to a total immersion situation rarely found outside France. Historical and current events are witnessed in an authentic French setting. French politics can be studied and debated as they happen. The daily French news, very popular in my classes, can provide information withheld from US television or may present it from a different, more realistic or more critical point of view. Speeches and decision making processes of major political figures are there to be observed by each individual student without having been distorted by a critical bias or the inevitably subjective interpretation of a textbook writer, journalist or a teacher.

The carefully selected gifts of technology thus create a powerful learning environment that is unprecedented. The huge progress that is being made by technology every day, seems accompanied by an ever increasing potential of helping us teach the world as it is, without much subjective interference. My efforts to achieve such a teaching/learning process for the benefit of the midshipmen in my courses have been quite encouraging and rewarding.